

Finicky Farm

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Dear (hopefully) neighbors-to-be:

Several months back, I was thrilled to be invited by the L'Etoile family to discuss leasing 70+ acres of prime farmland in dual-purpose agrisolar arrays at Four Star Farms. At the same time, I can well understand how a solar proposal of this scale could cause concern among those living nearby. Knowing that the formal planning board process for this project is now beginning, I thought it would be a good time to introduce myself and share my perspective and hopes for the project.

About me: I'm in my mid-forties, happily married, with three children. I have over 20 years of experience working for myself and for others at the interface of agriculture and conservation. I've done everything from hands-on livestock and forage production with small family farms to policy work and program management with large not-for-profit organizations. As a livestock producer and "grassfarmer," I'm proud to produce healthy, sustainable local protein, and to build soil health



and sequester carbon. But grassfarms need a lot of acreage, and we are facing major transitions in land ownership over the next few decades. Both in my conservation and policy work as well as in my work as a livestock producer, I view dual-use agrisolar systems as an excellent way to secure our region's agricultural landbase with long-term contracts while also keeping it in active agricultural use. The challenges of land access and farm transitions are also personal for me, and as a non-landowning farmer, the opportunity to secure a long-term lease and establish a viable, growth-oriented farm business would be a game-changer.

Both my wife and I are currently employed by The Trustees of Reservations at Chestnut Hill Farm in Southborough, Mass, where we live with our family and a flerd of sheep and goats (flock + herd = flerd). We love Chestnut Hill Farm, but like many other small farms in Eastern Mass, Chestnut Hill Farm is constrained in many ways that make it difficult to establish—and especially to over-winter—an economically-viable-scale livestock

operation. Pending approval of the Northfield solar project, I plan to develop an independent business based at Four Star Farms, with the land and infrastructure associated with the solar arrays as the wintertime home and year-round hub of a larger mobile grazing operation. The infrastructure brought to Four Star Farms by this project, such as livestock housing, a well and water lines, built-in shade for the animals in the form of elevated panels, and agricultural fencing around the entire array are necessary investments in grazing capacity that are made possible due to the solar investments. The dual-use aspects of this project are not just the dual-use of the land, but of the project's infrastructure as well.

My goal is for Finicky Farm to become a significant supplier of lamb and registered breeding stock to both local and regional markets while generating both environmental and economic value. In addition to the L'Etoile land, I hope to be able to lease and use additional currently unused farmland in Northfield, and to utilize "idled" land in the many conventional low-clearance solar arrays already built on former farmland throughout the state. With hard work and luck, I hope Finicky Farm will eventually become one of the largest, most innovative, environmentally-sensitive and humanely-managed sheep flocks in Massachusetts. With time, I also hope to implement cropping systems to take advantage of the unique advantages of this type of dual-use solar array.

I'm proud to have the chance to be part of this innovative, solution-focused project. Change can be good, and if we care about farms and farmland, we can't afford to stagnate. There are smart, motivated, well-financed people working on ways to grow food in labs or 3-D-print it with robots. I would rather develop new ways to sustainably and profitably grow food on farms, rather than in industrial parks. I hope you will support the L'Etoile family and my family as we jointly look to a cleaner, more environmentally sustainable future.

Kind regards,

Jesse

